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SUBJECT: COMORAN FM JAFFAR REITERATES PRO-AMERICAN STANCE

REF: ANTANANARIVO 815

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¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Foreign Minister Ahmed Said Ben Jaffar welcomed the Ambassador to the region, encouraging him to visit the Comoros to deliver credentials and see the country at the first opportunity.

Jaffar expressed frustration that the African Union (AU) had not upheld commitments with regard to isolating renegade Anjouan president Bacar, and said a diplomat might be posted to Addis Ababa to advocate the Comoros' cause. As top Union fundraiser, Jaffar explained the Anjouan stalemate was confounding substantial debt relief plans for the Comoros. He also made clear that the preoccupation with Anjouan was preventing President Sambi and his government from making progress on his development agenda, which may soon jeopardize Sambi's tenure. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) The Ambassador took advantage of Comoran Minister of External Affairs Ahmed Said Ben Jaffar's presence in Madagascar August 24 to invite him to lunch. Comoran Ambassador to Madagascar Charif Halidy, DCM, and PolEcon Chief (Notetaker) joined.

"Anglo-Saxon Pragmatism" Welcome

¶13. (SBU) Minister Jaffar restated the Union of the Comoros Government's pro-American policy, welcoming any U.S. effort to resolve the ongoing crisis in Anjouan and to provide long term U.S. development assistance. He emphasized that the very U.S. presence, in the form of our local staff person in Moroni and frequent trips by Embassy officers, provides encouragement. Lauding "Anglo-Saxon pragmatism," Jaffar noted the Union Government appreciates American involvement in the Comoros to diversify away from French influence and balance other partners.

¶14. (SBU) As Comoran officials often have, Minister Jaffar asked that Peace Corps return to the Comoros. He said the efforts and friendship of volunteers were warmly welcomed by the people before the program closed and are fondly remembered still. Jaffar also emphasized the Comoros must seek Millennium Challenge Corporation opportunities, and suggested President Sambi may travel to Washington from New York in September to see Ambassador Danilovich if possible.

¶15. (SBU) The Minister was candid that the Union courts close ties to the Arab League and other partners, but emphasized these relationships are consistent with friendship with the United States. Neither defending nor criticizing Iran, Jaffar downplayed the

significance of that relationship.

African Union and Anjouan

¶6. (SBU) Noting he has traveled to most AU meetings on the Comoros, Minister Jaffar expressed disappointment the regional bloc was not enforcing its own declarations about Anjouan. He said the Union of the Comoros will soon place a diplomat from the Embassy in Pretoria in Addis Ababa as a liaison to the African Union. As in our recent meeting with President Sambi (Reftel), Jaffar said the Union Government is planning action against Anjouan in the indefinite future. The July-August "Grand Marriage" season is coming to an end, and Ramadan begins soon; Jaffar intimated the Union would not take action during either of these periods.

¶7. (SBU) Jaffar reported that thousands of Anjouanese have already filed Mohamed Bacar's tyranny, arriving by boat in Moheli and Grande Comore. He further stated that pro-Union contacts in Anjouan have pledged they will join any attack on Bacar, "when they see a Union boat arriving, they will turn on Bacar's militia." Minister Jaffar repeated what we have heard: That Bacar rules by force and is very unpopular among Anjouanese. Bacar is especially resented for looting President Sambi's recently restored offices in Anjouan, destroying new vehicles and stealing equipment.

Donor Delays

¶8. (SBU) Minister Jaffar, whose portfolio includes Cooperation, bemoaned an IMF decision to stall talks on debt relief because of the Anjouan crisis. He reported the World Bank, African Development Bank (ADB), and IMF are prepared to forgive 70 percent of the Comoros' debt, requiring the Union government find funding to pay the other 30 percent. Jaffar noted that Anjouan's Port was funded with ADB loans, and thus contact with that island government is needed to pursue debt relief.

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¶9. (SBU) COMMENT: Minister Jaffar is an energetic and articulate advocate for his country, traveling frequently to lobby for help dealing with Anjouan and -- with any time left over -- for development assistance. He makes a persuasive case that, absent external assistance, Comoran development is likely to remain in a very low gear. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT